



CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

WASHINGTON, D. C. 20505

PUBLIC AFFAIRS

Phone: (703) 482-7676

26 February 1987

Mr. Anthony Lewis

STAT

Dear Tony:

I am amazed at the unusual number of lies about the CIA that the media are pushing these days. On top of that, some journalists, such as yourself, are recirculating old ones.

I am especially tired of reading again and again false stories and articles citing as fact that CIA was involved in the 1985 car bombing incident in Beirut that killed 80 people. Not only have I gone on record a number of times refuting Woodward's story, the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence (HPSCI)--one of our Congressional overseers--investigated the matter and absolved USG organizations--including CIA--from any direct or indirect involvement in the affair. I have enclosed a copy of a letter to THE WASHINGTON POST on the subject and the HPSCI biannual report which contains the results of its inquiry into the charges. Page 16 is the one you want.

Specifically, in regard to your article, "The Man Responsible," published in THE NEW YORK TIMES on 24 February, the CIA never trained the group that did the car bombing nor did it ever have any connection, direct or indirect, with anyone involved in it. The car bombing, in fact, was a rogue Lebanese operation.

I do not expect you or others to do the Agency any favors. It would be helpful, however, if writers such as yourself checked their facts before putting pen to paper. As the journalism fraternity Sigma Delta Chi's code of ethics states, "The news media should not communicate unofficial charges affecting reputation or moral character without giving the accused the right to reply."

I am here and would be happy to take your call on any matter affecting this Agency.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "George V. Lauder".

George V. Lauder
Director, Public Affairs

Enclosures as Stated

ABROAD AT HOME

Anthony Lewis

The Man Responsible

AS the Iran affair unravels, with one ugly disclosure hard upon another, President Reagan's authority crumbles. Feuds rage unchecked in the White House; policies go undecided. It is, at times, as if there were no President.

Yet Mr. Reagan himself still has a strange degree of personal immunity when the arms sales to Iran and other wrongdoings are examined. The attention is on his subordinates: Donald Regan, Oliver North, John Poindexter, William Casey and the rest.

We hear again and again that the President could reclaim his authority if only he cleaned house. Why doesn't he fire his self-regarding chief of staff, Mr. Regan? Why doesn't he order Colonel North and Admiral Poindexter to testify? As if, somehow, the buck stopped there. But it does not, and it will not.

It is true that Mr. Reagan is extraordinarily detached from the details of government. He always has been. What he said about the Iran disaster when he last talked about it publicly, in November, merely dramatized how little he cares for facts, how easily he converts wishes into assertions.

But a person in charge of an enterprise cannot escape responsibility by saying amiably that green is purple. In the United States we elect just one person to a national office with real power. To separate that power from responsibility would be to undermine the idea of democracy.

In Watergate, the impeachment process carried forward so impressively by the House Judiciary Committee viewed the President's responsibility in constitutional terms. Each of the three articles of impeachment approved by the committee found, in different particulars, that President Nixon had violated the duty put on Presidents by the Constitution to "take care that the laws be faithfully executed."

The abuses of power now known to have taken place in the Reagan Administration are more serious, more fundamental, than those involved in Watergate. That is evident even at this early stage of inquiry.

Mr. Nixon set up the Plumbers to deal with leaks and other problems in

extralegal ways. He tried to misuse the C.I.A. and other agencies for personal ends. He tried to deceive Congress. He tried to cover up crimes. Those were the recitations in the articles of impeachment.

The Reagan White House set up a subterranean government far more powerful than anything imagined by the Plumbers or their masters. The secret government sold arms abroad in violation of declared policy and regulations. It used private individuals as secret agents of the United States. It begged money from foreign governments.

There was brazen disregard for law. When Congress prohibited aid to the Nicaraguan contras, the Reagan White House arranged to get money to them in covert ways. When the President approved arms sales to Iran, the legal obligation to inform Congress's intelligence committees was ignored for months.

The theme running through all this was disregard for our constitutional system. Congress had vetoed aid to the contras, but that formal expression of our constitutional process was contradicted. The public would have been outraged by selling arms to Iran, so it was done in covert violation of commitments and law.

The covert operations become ever more extravagant as we learn about them. In 1985 a Lebanese group trained by the C.I.A. under a Reagan covert program killed 80 people with a car bomb in Beirut. Last year the President signed a finding allowing the C.I.A. to kidnap suspected terrorists abroad. Seymour Hersh reported in *The New York Times Magazine* on Sunday that the real intention of last year's raid on Libya was to kill Muammar el-Qaddafi. All these were the policy of the President, not of a subordinate.

Nor can there be any doubt, now, that a cover-up was attempted after the Iran story began to come out last November. White House aides frantically constructed a false chronology of events minimizing the President's role. Lies were told.

What we do not yet know is the degree of President Reagan's participation in these matters. The Judiciary Committee's impeachment bill in Watergate spoke of President Nixon "personally" furthering wrongs.

But if we cannot fix legal responsibility as yet for all the abuses of the Reagan White House, the political responsibility is clear. It was not Donald Regan or Oliver North who let our Government get dangerously out of hand in these last years. It was the President of the United States. □